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# A NECESSARY LIGHTNESS

**SATURDAY, 19 MAR 2022 at 7:30 P.M.**

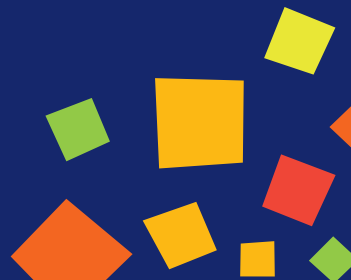
Metropolitan United Church

Please join us for **BEHIND THE MUSIC** at 7:00 P.M.

**Graham Mackenzie**, oboe soloist

**Evan Mitchell**, guest conductor

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# A NECESSARY LIGHTNESS

SATURDAY, 19 MAR 2022 at 7:30 P.M.

## Program

*Strum*

Jessie Montgomery (b. 1981)

Concerto in A minor for Oboe and Strings

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)

*Rondo Pastorale (Allegro moderato)*

*Minuet and Musette (Allegro moderato)*

*Scherzo (Presto – Doppio più lento – Lento – Presto)*

## INTERMISSION

Symphony No. 4

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

*Adagio - Allegro vivace*

*Adagio*

*Scherzo-trio: Allegro vivace*

*Allegro ma non troppo*

The approximate running time is 90 minutes

**London Symphonia** wishes to acknowledge and honour the land on which we are meeting as the traditional territory of the First Nations peoples; the Chippewa of the Thames First Nation (part of the Anishinaabe), the Oneida Nation of the Thames (part of the Haudenosaunee) and the Munsee-Delaware Nation (part of the Leni-Lunaape). Let us reflect on how we as individuals and as a community can carry this spirit of gratitude into everything we do to honour the work that all the First Nations peoples of the Turtle Island have done, and continue to do, for the land that supports us all.

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**London Symphonia** would like to thank the staff and volunteers of **Metropolitan United Church** and especially Rev. Jeff Crittenden for welcoming us into this beautiful church.

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# PROGRAM NOTES

by Jeffrey Wall

## **Jessie Montgomery (b. 1981): *Strum***

Jessie Montgomery is now well established among American composers as the recipient of numerous awards and commissions from major symphony orchestras and arts organizations in the United States and Canada, among them Canada's National Arts Centre and the Banff Centre for the Arts. She is also a violinist with the Catalyst Quartet, whose Glenn Gould-inspired debut album featured his rarely recorded String Quartet with their own quartet arrangement of Bach's *Goldberg Variations*, the work that bookended Gould's career in two landmark recordings. As composer, performer and educator Montgomery has long been associated with The Sphinx Organization in New York, which supports string players from the African-American and Latino communities.

*Strum* was composed in 2006 for a quintet of cellos, but was revised in 2012 for string quartet and for string orchestra. The piece illustrates Montgomery's ability to combine elements of classical and popular music in a personal and approachable manner. Because of the original five-cello conception, Montgomery writes, "...the voicing is often spread wide over the ensemble, giving the music an expansive quality of sound. Within *Strum I* utilized texture motives, layers of rhythmic or harmonic ostinati that string together to form a bed of sound for melodies to weave in and out. The strumming pizzicato serves as a texture motive and the primary driving rhythmic underpinning of the piece. Drawing on American folk idioms and the spirit of dance and movement, the piece has a kind of narrative that begins with fleeting nostalgia and transforms into ecstatic celebration."

Note: an *ostinato* (Italian for 'obstinate') is a brief recurring musical pattern that underlies a section of or even an entire composition. One familiar example is the endlessly repeating bass line of the perennial wedding favourite, Pachelbel's Canon (which is the bane of cellists everywhere).

## **Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958): Concerto for Oboe and String Orchestra**

Accounts of the Second World War usually focus on the conflict, so that it may be surprising to learn that for many in England the minutiae of everyday existence continued on, notwithstanding the inconvenience and danger of nightly air attacks. In 1944 Vaughan Williams' brother died, leaving him the sizeable family estate. The composer, observing that "if I ran the place properly I shouldn't have any time for my own work", decided to transfer the property to the National Trust, a process which turned out to be no less bureaucratic in wartime than in peace. While the wheels of government were turning he found himself forced to submit reports to the Ministry of Agriculture, for he was now classed as a "milk purveyor". There was also the business of sorting the considerable contents of the house of a well-to-do family (Vaughan Williams' was a descendant of Josiah Wedgwood), which was

inevitably time consuming. Yet in these circumstances he completed his Oboe Concerto.

However, the red tape bestowed one benefit upon posterity: the official who handled the estate transfer left a charming description of Vaughan Williams at the time. "An elderly, stout man, handsome and distinguished, not at all practical...[he is] a very sweet man with a most impressive appearance. He is big and broad and has a large head with sharply defined features, and eyes that look far into the distance ... In the car he told me that when young musicians came to him for advice he always discouraged them, for he said that those who seriously intended to make music their career would always do so willy-nilly. He has a quiet, dry humour which expresses itself in very few words. He laughs in a low key."

The concerto was written for the great British oboist Leon Goossens (1897-1988), a veteran of Covent Garden and the London Philharmonic, who first performed it in September 1944. The work looks both back to Vaughan Williams' earlier music (especially in its **first movement**, which follows the pattern of a number of his popular pieces by sandwiching a livelier folkish centre between two rhapsodic sections), and ahead to his austere postwar idiom. The concerto followed on the heels of the Fifth Symphony, premiered in November 1943, to which it is linked by the use in its **last movement** of a scherzo discarded from that tranquil masterpiece: the connection may be heard in the ghost of the Alleluia of the Anglican Easter Hymn, which played an important part in the symphony. Between the outer movements is a **Minuet and Musette** movement; the two dance forms, one in triple meter and the other in duple, are mingled rather than self-contained. A musette is characterized by a bagpipe-inspired drone, here sometimes in the solo oboe, sometimes in the basses.

### **Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827): Symphony No.4 in B flat major, Op.60**

Beethoven's Fourth Symphony has been among the most elusive of his works for his biographers, whose discussions of its origins disagree in many details; indeed, many writers barely mention it. What is known is that Beethoven was invited by his patron Prince Lichnowsky to visit his Silesian palace in the late summer of 1806. While there, Beethoven and Lichnowsky apparently travelled to the neighbouring estate of one Count Oppersdorf, who by hiring musically accomplished servants managed to keep an orchestra. A receipt in Beethoven's hand from February 1807 shows that Oppersdorf paid Beethoven for a symphony; this, combined with a November 1806 letter from Beethoven in which he observes that 'a gentleman of quality' would have the score of his new symphony until April 1807, furnishes the only evidence of the genesis of the Fourth. Beethoven's sketches, which provide such copious information about many other works, have not survived. The Symphony No.4 was published with a dedication to Oppersdorf, so the fact of his commissioning it seems unassailable.

However, the story does not end here, because there is another letter, from March 1808, in which Beethoven promises Oppersdorf to deliver "his" symphony, which has three trombones and piccolo in the last movement!—clearly the famous Fifth Symphony in C

minor, whose sketches show that in fact it had been begun sometime in 1804, long before the Fourth. Assuming that Oppersorf was the 'gentleman of quality' who first had the Fourth Symphony score and that the February 1807 payment was for the Fourth Symphony, it therefore appears that the Count ultimately commissioned two symphonies, and Beethoven preferred to write the B flat one before completing the C minor. But after accepting a down payment on the Fifth from Oppersdorf, the composer sent the Count a third letter in November 1808, to tell him that both the Fifth and the Sixth symphonies had now been sold to a publisher, though he was still going to send him 'the one intended for him'. Of course, part of what Oppersdorf had paid for was the exclusive right to perform the new symphony; evidently he never got satisfaction for this bit of chicanery.

In 1806 masterpieces were streaming from Beethoven's quill at an astonishing rate: the Fourth Symphony followed closely the Appassionata Sonata, the Fourth Piano Concerto, and at least one of the three 'Razoumovsky' string quartets, while the other two quartets and the Violin Concerto were completed by the end of the year. In so much illustrious company, and falling between the massive Third (Eroica) and defiant Fifth symphonies, the Fourth has been taken somewhat for granted. There are no Napoleonic or Fate associations, no storms or choirs to remember it by, although in the 1890's a suitably Romantic story, connecting it with a supposed engagement between Beethoven and his "Immortal Beloved", circulated in a few prominent books before it was proven to be balderdash. It is merely, like all Beethoven's symphonies, a musical work of the first order.

While many have pointed out similarities between the Fourth Symphony and the Second of 1802—such as their dimensions, their scoring and their buoyant demeanour—the Fourth is not entirely a return to an earlier style. Harmonically, it represents a step forward: the remarkable introduction mysteriously avoids the main key, B flat major, in part through 'punning' on the pitch G flat/F sharp (on a piano the same black key produces either note, but a written G flat can imply a different harmonic destination than an F sharp). The process (which your professor calls "enharmonic change") resembles the reinterpretation of the first phrase forced by the last in a gag like "The doctor told me to stay away from alcohol—so I'm drinking through a straw."

The listener's initial expectation is confounded. Beethoven exploits this notational ambiguity here and later in the movement to write in keys then not usually found in a B flat major symphony, giving it a new strangeness. Such chromatic harmony would become increasingly characteristic of 19th century composers, from Schubert to Bruckner.

That this boisterous upbeat symphony should have so sombre an **introduction** is an example of Beethoven's humour; at the end of it he figuratively throws off his cloak and roars with laughter at the success of his deception (and in fact, Beethoven had a very loud laugh). The detached notes in the introduction prove to have been a harbinger of the spiky main theme. Later, activity dwindles to almost nothing, with the two violin sections alone

trading notes; at this point, Beethoven plays his enharmonic card again, on D flat/C sharp and B flat/A sharp, taking the music to the remote key of B major. The long crescendo leading back to the main theme and main key again begins with the timpani and even outdoes the more famous one into the Finale of the Fifth Symphony.

The **Adagio** contrasts the plainness of its tiny opening martial motive with the expressiveness of the long singing melody it accompanies; in its use of solo winds and the intertwining of the string parts it has been compared to chamber music on a large scale (one thinks of the composer's Septet), while its use of instrumental colour, particularly the timpani, is a harbinger of the Romantic era.

Beethoven obviously used the term '**Menuetto**' loosely, for the quick metronome tempo he later placed on this movement is identical with the Second Symphony's 'Scherzo'. Here the composer plays with the cross-rhythm of two-note groups over three-note time. For the first time Beethoven introduces the trio twice, foreshadowing his Symphonies 6 and 7.

The **Finale** is very nearly a moto perpetuo for the strings (and one show-off bassoon). Passages in this movement recall the spiky figuration of the first movement; the mock-weary ending in slow motion is a final jest carried off with a flourish.

## PERFORMERS

### **Graham Mackenzie, oboe soloist**

Graham Mackenzie is principal oboist of London Symphonia, Windsor Symphony, and Niagara Symphony. He has also appeared with orchestras in Brantford, Chicago, Indianapolis, Kitchener-Waterloo, Toronto, and Winnipeg. Equally at home as a soloist, he has performed concertos by Bach, Marcello, Martinu, Mozart, Strauss, and Vivaldi, with the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony, Windsor Symphony, Niagara Symphony, and Hamilton Philharmonic, among others.

An avid chamber musician, Graham is a founding member of the Reed Minders Duo as well as Trio Pistachio, and has performed in many Kitchener-Waterloo Chamber Music Society concerts as well as the Fischhoff National Chamber Music Competition. In the contemporary music realm, he has performed with Soundstreams, New Music Concerts Toronto, and the Continuum New Music Ensemble.

Graham earned a Bachelor of Music from Wilfrid Laurier University, studying with James Mason, and a Master of Music from DePaul University, studying with Eugene Izotov. He is pursuing doctoral studies at Indiana University, where he has studied with Linda Strommen and Roger Roe.

He is currently instructor of Oboe at Stephen F. Austin State University (SFA) and previously he was the oboe studio instructor at Wilfrid Laurier University. He has conducted master

classes at the National Youth Orchestra of Canada, National Academy Orchestra, University of Victoria, University of Western Ontario, and Kenyon College.

### **Evan Mitchell, conductor**

Evan Mitchell is proving to be one of the most able and imaginative conductors in Canada. Mr. Mitchell has enjoyed seven triumphant seasons as Music Director of the Kingston Symphony, garnering praise for his programming, approach, and musical results. Prior to the pandemic, the past four full seasons' worth of Masterworks Series performances, under Mr. Mitchell's leadership, have been completely sold-out.

During his various conducting residencies, Mr. Mitchell led over 200 concerts, acted as a Canadian ambassador during a historic two-week tour of China, Korea and Macau, and served as an official consultant to the Vancouver Olympic Committee and Assistant Producer for the recording of the medal ceremony national anthems. Over the course of his career he has also brought the magic of orchestral music to over 750,000 students and children, many of whom had never experienced a live performance first hand. His programs for young people have been recognized for their appeal and educational mandate.

Equally comfortable in the realm of contemporary music, opera, and even film scores live-in-concert, Mr. Mitchell has premiered over 20 new Canadian works ranging from the SOCAN award winning opera "Storybook" by Darren Russo, to Ryan Trew's newly commissioned Symphony No. 1, as well as two digital full-orchestra world premieres during the COVID-19 lockdown (John Estacio: Domestic Divertimento, Dean Burry: Tracing Colville). He is a strong and vocal advocate for new, substantial, Canadian works.

Mr. Mitchell is a champion of initiatives designed to enhance the live concert experience, such as insider videos, informational podcasts, pre-concert talks, and special concerts devoted to live, onstage insights into major orchestral works. His program SoundSync, which involves real-time guided listening updates delivered silently to mobile devices during the concert, was recently hailed as one of Canada's best innovations to the live concert experience by the CBC.

During the 2020 pandemic, Mr. Mitchell wrote, produced, directed and edited several standout digital orchestral initiatives which exponentially increased the KSO's online profile of viewership. The Kingston Symphony's isolated digital performance of the complete final movement of Beethoven's Third Symphony, their specially curated Symphonic Education Partnership performance, and the landmark web series for young audiences entitled Harmon in Space ([www.harmoninspace.com](http://www.harmoninspace.com)) among others have reached over 100,000 viewers, and have been internationally acclaimed as being the benchmark for digital excellence in innovation.

Among his recent career highlights, Mr. Mitchell was Principal Conductor of the World Harp Congress, in which he conducted eight harp concerti with some of the world's most cel-

ebredated harpists. He is a regular guest conductor with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra and the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony Orchestra, and frequently conducts performances produced by Attila Glatz Concert Productions. He has also led orchestral collaborations with the Barenaked Ladies, Judy Collins, Johnny Reid, Omara Portuondo, Patrick Watson, Royal Wood, Whitehorse, and Pink Martini.

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– Moira Stewart, President,  
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- We recently signed a 10-year occupancy agreement with Metropolitan United, establishing our role as the revamped venue's anchor arts organization.

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## RITE OF SPRING

Saturday, 9 April 2022 at 7:30pm

*Metropolitan United Church*

London Symphonia celebrates the season of new life with Igor Stravinsky's monumental work *The Rite of Spring*, **Alice Ping Yee Ho's** *Jubilation of Spring* and the première of **Richard Mascal's** *Ziigwan* (Spring), commissioned by London Symphonia and conducted by **Tania Miller**.

*Ziigwan* takes us into the forest as plants and creatures awaken through the gift of the sun's warmth after their long winter's sleep. Joining the orchestra for *Ziigwan* will be the mesmerizing storytelling of **John Rice**, an Elder of Wasauksing First Nation, and musical force of nature, violist **Sharon Wei**.

Canadian composer Alice Ping Yee Ho's *Jubilation of Spring* symbolizes the exuberance of the Chinese Lunar New Year Celebration and celebrates the coexistence of different cultures and traditions within Canada.

A darker vision, the music to the ballet *The Rite of Spring* depicts a fictional ritual wherein a young woman selected as part of the eponymous Rite dances herself to death to ensure a prosperous year in pre-industrial Russia.

## RHYTHMS OF THE CITY

Saturday, 30 April 2022 at 7:30pm

*Metropolitan United Church*

**Stewart Goodyear** and London Symphonia celebrate the rhythms of the city, night and day, by composers who set their own boundaries.

For too long have musicians been asked to set aside the work of composition in the service of mastering the art of performance as if their spirit was not large enough to contain both composer and performer. Blessedly, this attitude is passing, and at the forefront of a generation of serious musicians who embrace the totality of artistic life is Stewart Goodyear, a phenomenal and acclaimed performer of canonic repertoire whose own compositions stand proudly and comfortably alongside monuments of the past.

This concert of works by **Goodyear**, **Gershwin** and **Good** blurs the lines between chamber and orchestral music, tradition and innovation, composer and performer.

Alongside Goodyear, you'll hear the astounding virtuosity of Symphonia's own players including Principal Clarinet **Graham Lord**.

*Thank you for joining us this evening. Tickets and concert details are available online at [londonsymphonia.ca](http://londonsymphonia.ca) or by calling 226.270.0910.*



### HELP US MAKE THE MUSIC POSSIBLE

We can no longer rely on London Symphonia's ticket sales for 30% of our total revenue. Other sources of income for the Symphonia such as grants, corporate giving and individual donations are vital to keep you enjoying the music.

**WAYS TO GIVE:** Please visit us online at [londonsymphonia.ca](http://londonsymphonia.ca) or call 226.270.0910

